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SUBJECT: BARROSO ANNOUNCES NEW LINE-UP FOR COMMISSION

1. (U) EU Commission President-designate Barroso on November 4 announced a new line-up for his Commission. Speaking on the fringes of the Brussels European Council, Barroso said he hoped the European Parliament would approve his new team during its November 15-18 plenary session after conducting hearings next week with the changed candidates. Barroso's new proposal includes only three changes:

- The Italian Commissioner-designate (replacing Rocco Buttiglione) will be Foreign Minister Franco Frattini, who will be a Vice-President of the Commission with responsibility for Justice, Freedom and Security;
- The Latvian Commissioner-designate (Ingrida Udre) has been replaced by former Education and Finance Minister Andris Piebalgs, who will take up the Energy portfolio (replacing Hungarian Commissioner-designate Laszlo Kovacs). Barroso noted that Piebalgs' "scientific education" would make him suitable for the job;
- Kovacs, will take up responsibility for Taxation and Customs Union (originally Udre's portfolio). While admitting that Kovacs' performance at his EP hearing as Energy Commissioner was not deemed to be very positive, Barroso was convinced Kovacs would do better with Tax.

2. (U) Barroso "promised" these would be "necessary and sufficient changes" to earn the EP's approval. Taking questions, he defended the continued assignment of the Competition portfolio to Dutch Commissioner-designate Neelie Kroes, who responded to allegations about potential conflicts of interest "in a very transparent way." Kroes had resigned all her corporate directorships, sold her shares, declared all her interests and pledged not to return to business after leaving the Commission, thus going beyond the ethical requirements of the job. Barroso said he would meet November 5 with the leaders of the EP political groups to discuss practicalities for the next stages of the confirmation procedure. Barroso said he expected the EP to organize new hearings quickly for the three Commissioners-designate.

3. (U) Speaking at a separate press conference earlier, EP President Borrell (a Spanish Socialist) also suggested the above calendar, with hearings next week, assuming the EP dispensed with the traditional written questionnaire in advance of hearings. Borrell said he could only assume that the EP political groups will be able to show "as much flexibility as the Council (read: the EU governments) would have shown." Borrell nevertheless served notice the EP "would not lower our standards" and that requirements at the new hearings will be the same as at the previous ones. According to press reports, Martin Schulz, leader of the EP's Socialist group (which was instrumental in blocking Barroso's earlier team) has welcomed Barroso's "enlightened and courageous step."

4. (SBU) COMMENT: For the second time, (the first being when he attempted to earn EP approval for his original team through only minor changes to Buttiglione's responsibilities), Barroso is choosing to make the minimum possible changes that could get him through. It is not entirely clear whether this approach is a reflection of his personal philosophy or a function of the constraints imposed upon him by EU governments. But Barroso was clearly given only limited room for manoeuvre by Member States. He dropped clear hints in his press conference that Budapest had refused to replace Kovacs, and the Dutch had strongly resisted any shift of Kroes' responsibilities. Based on the comments by Borrell and Schulz, it appears almost certain that this time Barroso's team will win EP confirmation, and be able to take office before the end of November. END

COMMENT.

SCHNABEL